DEMONOLOGY IN THE KABBALAH

In the kabbalistic tradition, Talmud and Midrash represented the major sources for the kabbalists to develop and systematize demonology. In particular, two main different approaches have been undertaken in order to achieve this purpose: at first the kabbalists sought to adjust and shape demonology according to their perception of the world. Hence, they tried to explain this phenomenon through their own vision of reality. Secondly, they implemented external elements especially from Christian demonology, early medieval Arabic demonology and German and Slavic popular tales. With a particular regard to the practical kabbalah (magic), is thus possible to notice the syncretistic character of the entire doctrine since many of the abovementioned elements were not modified to meet the Judaic traditions but they were kept as they were and added to the discourse.

It is difficult to find a consensus among the kabbalists regarding demonology. Cultural differences, past traditions and intellectual insight were substantially different from one kabbalist to another. For example, Nahmanides commentary concerning the Leviticus (17:7) sets forth the idea that the demons (*shedim*) dwell in desolated, cold and abandoned lands. They were not created from the four elements but only from two elements such as fire and air. They appear as slim, indiscernible to the human senses and they can fly through fire and air. As human beings though, they die and are subjected to the laws of creation. They draw their energy from fire and water, sap and odors. This explains why the necromancers were burning incense for the summoning. Flying through air allows them to approach the Zodiac and in so doing they are able to predict the future but not the remote one. Some kabbalists conceived their existence as related to the last degrees of the power of the "left" emanation (*sitra ahra*, the "other side od the Zohar"), which, in turn, corresponds to the ten evils and sanctified Sefirot. In any case, there is a general consensus among the kabbalists that Samael and Lilith govern the satanic forces.

The Zohar, on the other hand, points out the fact that some demons originated from the encounter between demonic powers and human beings. Lilith was created during the very first six days of the Creation, in particular during the twilight that precedes the Sabbath, as discarnate identity. Through the encounter with humans they sought to acquire their characteristics. Later kabbalistic views claim that these demons stemming from the contact with humans are illegitimate progeny (*banim shovavim*).

In the Zohar two types of demons are being recognized: those coming from the "left side" that received specific orders from the "palaces of impurity"; the others are the devils lingering in the air. The latter populate the celestial space between the earth and the moon and they are usually active during the night, at around midnight. Sometimes demons lie to humans about their future and tend to confuse them during their dreams through a mix of lies and truths. The deceiving character of the demons is quite a common feature in different traditions.

A variety of sources mention the existence of the mothers of demons: Na'amah, Lilith, Agrath and Mahalath. Evil spiritual forces that under their domains act at a specific time and they represent a danger for the entire world. Often they gather on a mountain where they have sexual encounters with Samael (the "mountain of darkness"). This resembles to the Sabbath of the Witches and to Christian demonology.

Demons have kings as well. Samael and Ashmedai are the most important. The latter is sometimes considered to be the son of Na'mah and sometimes as the son of king David and Agrath, the queen of the demons. Numerous are also demons coming from the Arabic tradition such as Bilar whose name can be found already in some proto-christian traditions and Apocalyptic scripts, mostly known as Beliar. Beliar has an important role in the practical Kabbalah where its name is Bileth. With this name it became an integral part of the german magic literature through the legend of Faust.

A systematic and comprehensive study of demonology can be traced in the *Sibbat Ma'aseg ha-Egel ve-Inyan ha-Shedim,* which was redacted after the Zohar period. Another important book is the *Zefunei Ziyyoni* (XIV century) in which there is a combination of doctrines from the Zohar and Arabic sources. It also includes a long list of prominent demons and their features and the original Arabic names are being used. This book became the main channel through which the practical Kabbalists of Germany and Poland draw their inspirations as well as the Ashkenazi demonologists both in Hebrew and Yiddish. The Ma'haseh Bukh for instance provides numerous details about this type of literature of the late medieval period.

Some Christian elements were added too. Demons such as Astarot and Beelzebub started to be an integral part of the spells and of the taxonomy. Usually, a hierarchical order is in place where Samael, Lord of Edom, and Ammon of No, Lord of Egypt, are at the top of the pyramid. The later appears in many sources written around the XV century. Unlike Nahmadimes, during the

Renaissance, some authors spoke of the demons as being born out of the four elements, a concept that was quite widespread among the European demonologists. Isaac Luria, in his Kabbalah, does not mention any particular name or feature concerning demons. He utilizes the term *kelippot* ("shells") to define them; they must be dominated and controlled through the conformity with the Torah and the *mizvot*.

According to Isaac of Acco the devils only have four fingers and tend to deceive and mock humans and for that they are being called *kesilim* ("the deceivers"). From the beginning of the XVII century a demon called *Shomer Appim* started to appear in the literature. Its goal is to hit the person who does not close a sacred book. For some Jewish of Germany, the four queens govern the four seasons: every three months, when the season is about to change, their menstrual blood falls into the water poisoning them. This could explain why, in the geonic era, people were mot allowed to drink water during seasonal changes. The Queen of Saba as well has a prominent position; she was considered as one of the queens with the name of Lilith and her name later appeared in many different manuscripts.